

Newport Forest

Thursday May 19 2011

2:30 - 7:15 pm

Weather: prec. 72 mm; RH 100%; BP 101.5 kPa; ovcast; S 5-10 kmh; T18° C

Purpose: to check plantings, gather samples, and visit Dogwood

Participants: Kee

I had no idea how much rain had fallen on the property (apart from hydroplaning through ditches) until I got down to the trailer and read the rain gauge, slapping my forehead: 72 mm! I wouldn't have thought so much, but there it was!

I toured the Regeneration Zone, marveling at the new growth, then checked the recently planted trees; almost all in the process of leafing out. Out of the RZ, it struck me that I was seeing multiples of bird species not seen in previous years, particularly Blue Jays, Brown-headed Cowbirds; Common Flickers; and Northern Orioles. The Rose-breasted Grosbeaks were also quite abundant, but their numbers on the property have been gradually increasing over the last decade. The Eastern Towhee is still here, on the other hand, but we hear it less frequently.

Neither Chipmunks or Red Squirrels will tolerate any birds on trays during their refill visits. It was a common sight today to see several birds of various species waiting on branches nearby for the squirrels to leave.

Sitting in the Nook I could hear several male American Toads singing down in the Fleming Creek Forest and later, as I walked past Vernal Ponds A and B, two Western Chorus Frogs were still calling

I took the Thames River Trail to the river and up to the bluffs, where I could see that it was still in a state of minor flood (about 2 m above normal) and roiling with muddy runoff. No shore birds to see; no shore! I continued on to the Riverside Forest, coming in through Bluebell Woods. The Virginia Bluebells were pretty much at their peak.

After photographing the main patch of Bluebells, I did a quick survey of the area, including smaller patches, in an effort to answer a question posed by Jane Bowles about recent changes in Bluebell distribution. The main patch is now about 60 m long, with a varying width that maxes out at about 25 m. I was surprised to count some six patches 2-3 m in diameter in the surrounding forest, including some further west that were not there in previous years, I was even more surprised to find three entirely new patches some 100 m deeper into the Riverside Forest closer to the Hogsback, also new, including individual plants scattered here and there. It

looked rather like an invasion. I recall noting with amusement last year that the expanding main patch had wiped out an adjoining area of Garlic Mustard! Take that, you French cooks!

While surveying the main patch my attention was caught by a peculiar, rather large and elongated Bumblebee. However, it turned out not to be an insect at all, but a humming bird, our common Ruby-throat. Apparently it was probing the Bluebells with its long bill. Checking later on the web, I discovered that Bluebells are a favorite food source for hummingbirds. See -- Read -- Learn.

I continued along the main trail to the foot of the Hogsback, where a small troop of dark brown mushrooms grew on a dead Bitternut branch. (Photo + Sample). Everywhere I looked the Wild Geraniums were out and in full bloom. They always seem to grow singly and never in patches. Since the trail was still too boggy to walk, I went off-trail and climbed the Hogsback directly, arriving at the top some ten minutes later and still fresh. I walked north along its length, frequently dodging tangled brush and thinking to myself, "I must be picking up lots of ticks today . . ." Presently I arrived at an open area that Pat and I call the "Alpine Meadow," covered with grasses and sedges and dotted here and there with thorn trees. I followed a deer trail to the point where the wood closed in again and beyond that came upon an immense Autumn Olive tree, multistemmed and about a foot in diameter at the base! Could this be the grandfather tree? Just beyond that, growing beneath a small cliff, I found the Flowering Dogwood, the object of my expedition. The blooms were still fully out, but browning a bit at the edges, even as green seeds swelled in the central cluster. Continuing on my way, I came upon a large patch of May-apples. (P) Meanwhile, the Hogsback was becoming progressively narrower. At the point where it was only 3-4 m wide, it began to descend. By the time it was about 1 m wide, I found myself stepping onto the main Thames River Trail again, right near the River Landing. (I must resist the temptation to make a Hogsback trail!)

Back at camp, I did some passive birding in the Nook, where something peculiar happened: I heard a Great Crested Flycatcher in the distance and thought to myself, "You know, I've never actually seen a Great Crested Flycatcher while it made its "weeb" call. How do I really know that's what it is?" Within a minute I heard a very loud "weeb" beside me and looked up to see a Great Crested Flycatcher no more than 2 m away! As if that weren't enough, a Northern Oriole flew in to serenade me from another branch from the opposite side.

For the rest of my stay, I enjoyed the mating antics of a pair of Blue Jays. The

female would make a small sighing sound, unusual for a Blue Jay, followed by a lusty croak from the male. The female would then fly up to the next branch, make another such call, while the male flew up to an adjacent branch, croaking again. And on it went.

My last task of the day was to walk up to the Copse (a great place for mosses and fungi) to collect a whole patch of moss to go through in my “lab”. At home I counted three ticks on my person.

Birds: (22)

American Crow (TR); American Goldfinch (Rd); American Robin (GF); Bald Eagle (LM); Black-capped Chickadee (Tr); Blue Jay (EW); Brown-headed Cowbird (LM); Common Flicker (BCF); Downy Woodpecker (Tr); Eastern Towhee (RSF); Gray Catbird (BCF); Great Crested Flycatcher (GF); Mourning Dove (GF); Northern Cardinal (RSF); Northern Oriole (RB); Red-bellied Woodpecker (RSF); Rose-breasted Grosbeak (GF); Ruby-throated Hummingbird (BW); Song Sparrow (TR); Tree Swallow (Rd); White-breasted Nuthatch (LM); Wild Turkey (FCF) Best Bird: *Ruby-throated Hummingbird*

New Species:

‘Shadow-winged Tachinid’ *Leschenaultia* sp. Tr KD My19/11

Phenology:

Wild Geraniums in full bloom, Flowering Dogwood just past its peak blooming phase, Bluebells at their peak.

Climate note: The Bulletin of April 7 has this entry: “By mid-February last I had the notion that we were in for a cool, wet spring. The notion was brought on by the pattern of precipitation to that point, as well as the knowledge that we were in a La Nina year. I am also predicting a better-than-average year for precipitation.”

Newport Forest Archives: Bulletins for 2008 to the present may be found archived at the following website. Scroll to bottom and click on “archives”.

<http://www.csd.uwo.ca/~akd/conservation/Newport.html>

MAGES:



Virginia Bluebells appear to be spreading every year. Older blooms turn a pinkish-purple colour. (with apologies for the tilted landscape)



Our “Alpine Meadow” at the north end of the Hogsback is likely a remnant logging road used by the Newport brothers to skid out commercial timber. A deer trail can be seen following its length.



The blooms on this Flowering Dogwood could not be photographed any closer, owing to the tree being rooted at the base of a 20-foot precipice next to my feet. The tree is now nearing the end of its flowering phase.